

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER
LISTED

FEB 09 2005

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Crest Theater

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1905 Lakin Avenue [N/A] not for publication

city or town Great Bend [N/A] vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Barton code 009 zip code 67530

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In
my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be
considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [])

Christy Davis
Signature of certifying official/Title Christy Davis/Deputy SHPO Date 12/23/07

Kansas State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [])

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet [].
☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
See continuation sheet [].
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.
☐ removed from the
National Register
☐ other, explain
See continuation sheet [].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

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Barton County, KS

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of
Kansas

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

Current Functions

RECREATION & CULTURE: Live Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Moderne

Materials

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Terra Cotta

Glass Block

Roof: Asphalt

Other: Brick

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

**Crest Theater
Barton County, KS
Applicable National Register Criteria**

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Architecture
Recreation/Culture

Periods of Significance

1950-1955

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Boller and Lusk
Flett Construction Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Great Bend Public Library
Kansas State Historical Society

Crest Theater
Barton County, KS

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10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property less than 1 acre**UTM References**A. Zone Easting Northing
14 520616 4246282

B. Zone Easting Northing

C. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Kristen Ottesen, Architectural Historian and Elizabeth Rosin, Partnerorganization Historic Preservation Services, LLC date June 2004street & number 323 West 8th Street, Suite 112 telephone 816-221-5133city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64105**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black-and-white photographs** of the property.**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Great Bend Community Theater/City of Great Bendstreet & number Box 361 telephone 620-792-4228city or town Great Bend state KS zip code 67530

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Crest Theater
Barton County, Kansas

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT

The Crest Theater, located at 1905 Lakin Avenue, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, is a three-story masonry enframed wall commercial block building. The building features a glazed terra cotta façade and measures approximately 150 feet deep and 50 feet wide. The Crest Theater is a late example of the grand movie palace property type, exhibiting the general form, configuration, and architectural detailing of movie palaces that appeared in commercial districts in major United States cities mainly during the inter-war years of the early twentieth century. Constructed in 1950, it is a very late design by noted theater architect Robert Boller, a partner in the firm Boller and Lusk. The theater has a concrete foundation, solid brick walls, and steel trusses that support the roof and floor. The use of terra cotta tile sheathing and glass on the primary façade give the theater bold geometric lines and a distinct Art Moderne appearance. The theater is in excellent condition and with the majority of its character-defining stylistic features and original materials intact, the Crest Theater retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

SETTING

The Crest Theater is on the south side of Lakin Avenue, facing north toward the Barton County Courthouse on Great Bend's historic courthouse square. The theater directly abuts the concrete sidewalk at its front and shares party walls with twentieth century one- and two-part commercial block buildings to its east and west. The rear (south) elevation faces an alley and a surface parking lot.

EXTERIOR

The Crest Theater's sweeping symmetrical primary (north) façade features a recessed central block flanked by two quarter-round wings that flare forward and outward from the central block. Pink, turquoise blue, and yellow glazed terra cotta tile cover the symmetrical, streamlined Art Moderne front wall. Rectangular horizontal glass block windows punctuate the terra cotta. Pink fluted pilasters and yellow decorative tile blocks frame the tripartite glass block



The Crest Theater

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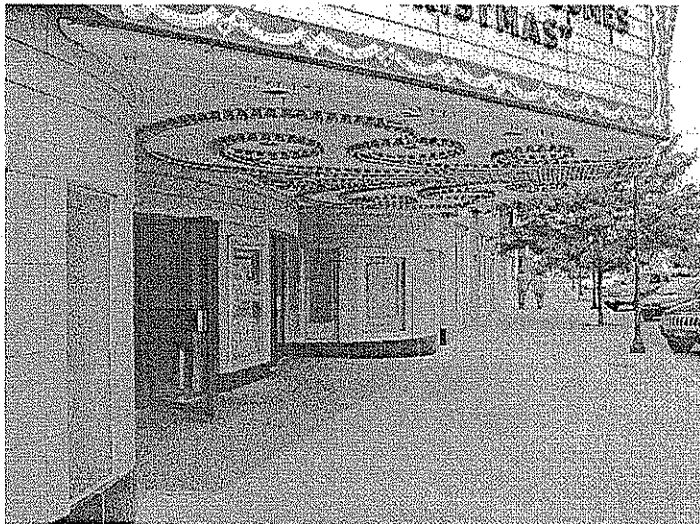
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Crest Theater
Barton County, Kansas

fenestration at the center of the north wall. Turquoise coping spans the top of the façade, connecting the central core to the flanking wings. On the wings, the turquoise terra cotta tile forms wide bands of color that span the tops of the wings and forms narrower bands that frame the bipartite glass block window, visually creating a column abutting the juncture of the wings with the main block. Smooth pink terra cotta tile covers the end bays of the wings from the turquoise band at the top downward to the sidewalk.

Just above the first story, a large triangular marquee spans the width of the façade and projects outward.



Underside of Marquee

Neon and 860 incandescent lights embellish the red and white marquee. The name "Crest," depicted in an illuminated metal cutout, rests on top of both sides of the marquee. The marquee references the form of the façade with sweeping wing-like ends. Geometric Art Moderne inspired bands of red, grey, and white span the marquee and wings, forming a background for the white panels designed to advertise the current attraction. A swirling pattern of incandescent and neon lights embellish the underside (or ceiling) of the projecting marquee.

At the first story, the front elevation consists of three main parts — a central entrance spanning the width of the central block flanked by the two curved side walls. The central entrance has a center bay containing a movie poster case flanked by entrances. Originally, three aluminum-framed glass doors filled each entrance; however, to accommodate wheelchair access, these openings now contain new double-leaf aluminum-framed glass doors. These doors are the façade's only non-original feature. The flanking side walls each have four bays defined by openings. The west side wall of the first story features an inset movie poster case flanked by two vertical rectangular windows. These window openings each contain a fixed sash with a single pane. The end bay contains a paneled full glass door that opens into the storefront space. The east side wall contains a single-leaf door; the ticket window; a single-pane, fixed window; and a single-leaf full-glass door in the outer bay that provides egress from the second floor balcony stairs. The ticket booth has a wide fixed-pane window set flush with the wall that has openings in the center of the window to speak through and at the bottom for the exchange of money and tickets. The design of this ticket booth was a departure from the traditional

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Crest Theater
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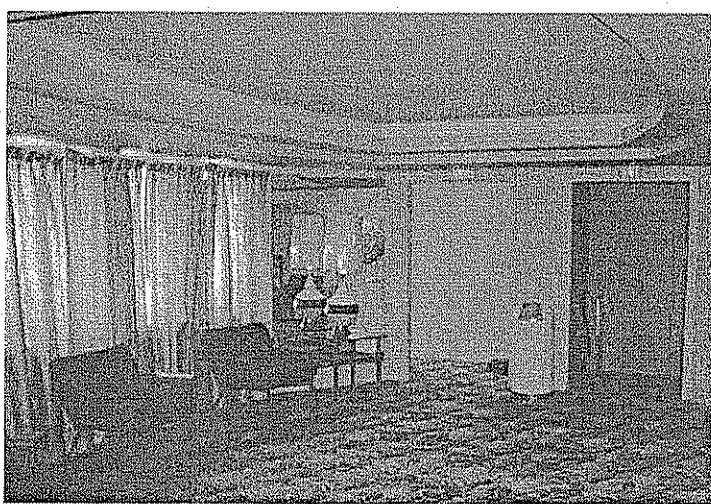
projecting ticket booth located between pairs of entrance doors. A brushed, corrugated metal panel below the window provides visual interest.

The east, west, and south elevations of the theater are unadorned brick. The south end of the east elevation is currently painted with signs advertising several local businesses. None of the secondary elevations relate visually to the façade.

INTERIOR

The Moderne styling of the exterior continues in the foyer of the Crest Theater. A curvilinear, flat soffit floats just below the ceiling. Mounted behind the cornice are recessed, indirect light fixtures. Carpet covers the lobby floor and the painted plaster walls are a neutral color. Movie poster cases adorn the walls near the entrance. The original simple, metal, surface-mounted ceiling lights appear throughout the lobby.

The plan of the Crest Theater is typical of mid-twentieth century movie palace design. The large lobby is



Mezzanine Lounge

directly inside the front entrance. Stairwells on either side of the lobby ascend to the mezzanine, restrooms, and balcony. The stairs feature graceful Moderne style curvilinear metal railings. On the second floor, at the front of the building, there is an open mezzanine lounge. Accessed from both the east and west sides of the lobby and the balcony, this room is elliptically shaped and has a stepped coved ceiling with recessed indirect lighting. Originally this elegantly furnished room had "full mirrors, sectional seats with gray nylon upholstery, and ebony end tables."¹ The room now features

simple wood frame upholstered chairs and wood tables. The men's and women's restrooms flank the lounge at the front of the building and feature tiled floors and walls.

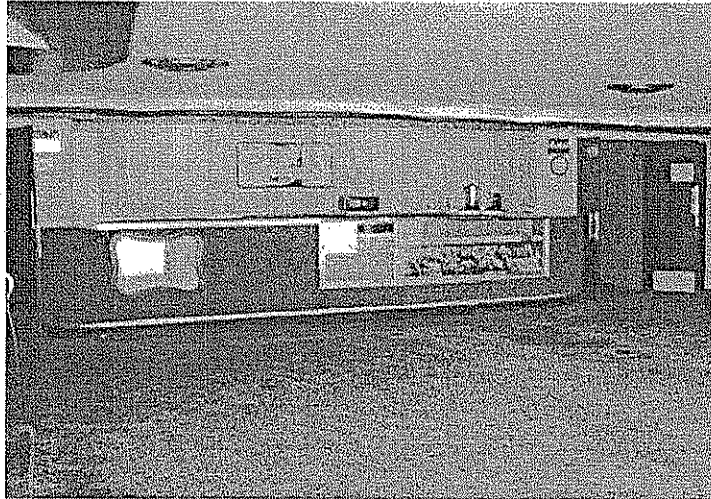
The concession area occupies the first floor of the south lobby wall directly opposite the entrance. The concession stand was built for the Crest Theater by Sinicrope & Sons Co. of North Hollywood, California and features a self-service refrigerated section for ice cream, a popcorn warmer, a refrigerated candy

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Lobby and Concession Stand

section, and soft drink storage.² Although alterations to the concession area have been made since 1950, some original features remain, including the curvilinear display case inset. Directly flanking the concession stand are double-leaf doors that provide access to the large auditorium.

On the west side of the lobby, a pair of drinking fountains is set in a wall of yellow and green ceramic tile. An Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant restroom was installed on the east side of the lobby in a former storage room. A door on the west side of the lobby provides access to the

office. In the east and west ends of the lobby's south wall, single-leaf doors open to a soundproof "cry room" for infants and toddlers and a "party" room. These two enclosed rooms each have seven theater seats and feature large picture windows facing the auditorium stage/screen.

The simple ornament of the large rectilinear auditorium includes concrete floors with carpeted aisles, a stage, a stenciled ceiling, and upholstered seats. Originally, the theater had seating for nearly one thousand people on the main floor and in the double-tiered balcony. While the 1993 installation of new seats on the main floor reduced seating capacity, the balcony continues to retain its original seating. It appears that all of the carpet on the floors is non-original; however, the carpet on top of the balcony railing may be the carpet originally installed throughout the building. Draped fabric covers the plaster walls. Most of the draperies are non-original, but the stage opening retains its original "lipstick-red" curtain. The simple and plain proscenium frames the stage. The original surface-mounted light fixtures are extant under the balcony.

A stage spans the width of the south end of the auditorium. It has been enlarged from its original size to accommodate live and musical performances. A basement located under the stage at the south end of the theater houses mechanical equipment.

INTEGRITY

¹ *The Great Bend Press*, 5 November 1950, p. 2, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

² *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, p. 2-B, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

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The Crest Theater continues to function as a movie theater. In addition to its original form, plan, proportions, scale, and massing, the building retains its historic character-defining elements and original materials on the exterior, including the polychrome terra cotta, glass block, and marquee. With the exception of the expansion of the stage area, the interior retains its original plan and spatial elements. Although some of the historic finishes and seats have been replaced, a significant percentage of its original materials and design elements remain. The Crest Theater retains a high degree of integrity and clearly communicates its historic associations and feelings as an entertainment venue.

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Crest Theater
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Crest Theater at 1905 Lakin Avenue in Great Bend, Kansas is significant under National Register Criterion A for the area of RECREATION/CULTURE and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as documented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas." The Crest Theater has direct associations with the historic context "Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1954," developed as part of the MPDF and meets the MPDF registration requirements. Constructed in 1950 at the heart of Great Bend's square, it is an excellent late example of the grand movie palace property type constructed in Kansas and throughout the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. Its exuberant Art Moderne façade and interior are significant examples of the designs dating to the latter part of the career of nationally recognized theater designer Robert Boller, who completed the design for this theater in conjunction with architect Dietz Lusk. The building's design also reflects the theater's association with the Commonwealth Theater Company. The design of the theater is additionally notable as a high style illustration of an architectural style rarely seen in Kansas and as an expression of the nation's period of renewal and optimism following the end of World War II. While many similar theaters of the era have been demolished or drastically altered for other commercial endeavors when more modern movie houses open in the vicinity, the Crest Theater remains intact. Its current use as a live performance venue complements its original function. The period of significance for the Crest Theater begins with its construction in 1950 and concludes in 1955, the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility.

PROPERTY HISTORY

The Crest Theater was constructed in 1950 by the Kansas City-based Commonwealth Theatres, which operated a chain of eighty-five theaters across the Midwest. The first theater in the Commonwealth chain was the Plaza Theater in Great Bend, which was just around the corner and to the south of the Crest Theater on Main Street. Although the War Production Board would not release materials for the construction of the Crest Theater in 1946 and 1949, the Commonwealth Theater chain finally received approval to build the Crest Theater in early 1950 and proceeded to demolish the older Kansan Theatre to make room for the construction of the Crest. The new movie palace incorporated a wide variety of fireproof materials, including concrete, masonry, steel, Perlite ceilings, metal lath, and fireproof fabrics for the curtains and upholstered seats.

Three construction companies competed for the contract to build the Crest Theater — Val Borden Construction Company of Salina, Kansas; L. L. Van Fossen of Great Bend, Indiana; and Flett Construction Company of Kansas City, Missouri. They awarded the job to the Flett Construction Company. The United Neon Company of Kansas City, Missouri built the marquee and the E & E Glass

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Company of Great Bend, Indiana supplied the Pittsburgh Glass glass block.³ A newspaper article at the time mentioned that a Chicago firm manufactured the terra cotta.⁴

The Crest Theater offered the ultimate in luxury and elegance as well as many innovative elements. "Extras" described in the souvenir program from opening night included the "Modern Cry Room — our answer to the Baby Sitter Problem"; the "Party Room — for Small Line Parties, or those evenings you bring your dinner guests"; the "Special Low Fountain for the Kiddies — Temperature of water controlled year around"; "Television Provisions — The only theatre in the middle-west with facilities for direct by wire television programs when available"; and the "Pay Telephone Service in the Lobby — for your convenience. Should your children desire transportation, the cashier in the box office will be happy to make the call."⁵

The theater featured artwork as well. Artist Frank Oswald prepared all of the interior decorations and paintings, including a Bambi-themed mural in the cry room, a South Pacific-themed black light mural in the mezzanine lounge, and a Mexican-themed party room. Throughout the theater, Oswald used the color palette selected by the architects — grey, chartreuse, and lipstick red. In the auditorium and lobby, the wainscot was blue-green to complement the patterned carpet. When he began work on the Crest Theater, Oswald had been decorating theaters for ten years and had completed projects in Creston, Iowa as well as in Goodland and Pratt, Kansas.

In addition to the Moderne design, the building incorporated many technological innovations, beginning with the sidewalk in front of the building, which was heated to prevent accumulation of snow and ice. One-inch copper tubes spaced twelve inches apart in a bed of sand beneath the sidewalk circulated heated water to keep the concrete warm. A gas-fired steam boiler warmed the air that heated the theater, which was divided into two zones. One zone included the auditorium and the other zone included the auxiliary spaces. In the summer, the same ducts and blower system cooled the building. The air conditioning system used water that was drawn from a deep well by turbine pumps and run through three sets of coils to pre-cool the air before sending it to the refrigeration system, which lowered the air temperature with Freon. The building also had two ventilation systems — one for the restrooms and concession stand and one for the projection booth.⁶ To improve fireproofing and acoustical properties, they applied a new

³ *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, Advertisements, 8 November 1950, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

⁴ "Fanfare, Kleig Lights Mark Crest Opening Tomorrow," *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

⁵ "Introducing the New Crest Theatre," Souvenir Program, 1950, Great Bend Community Theater, Great Bend, Kansas.

⁶ "Crest Boasts Ultra-Modern Heating and Refrigeration," *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, p. 6-B, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

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material, Perlite, to the ceilings. Even the concession stand featured new technology, incorporating a concealed sink and water faucets to make "constant cleaning of the installation a much easier job."⁷

The accommodation of television technology was planned, but appears never to have been fully executed. A small platform at the middle of the front balcony wall was built for a television projector. Three three-and-a-half-inch coaxial cables would have connected the projector to the control room. In 1950, it was thought that television programs would perhaps be broadcast in movie theaters one day. Elton Kuhlman, manager of the Crest Theater, speculated that "sports events will be a natural for movie television. Another possibility is that television in the movies can be used to carry the big premieres in Hollywood from coast to coast the same night they are shown for the first time." Kuhlman also thought that the technology of television would make the distribution of single copies of film to each theater obsolete, stating that "there are tremendous potentialities in the idea that a single film might serve hundreds of theaters simultaneously."⁸

The name "Crest" was as innovative and modern as the building's appearance and function. Management searched long and hard for a name and at first considered more historical names such as Barton, Pawnee, and Cheyenne. They did not favor any of these names because they had associations with established businesses. The graphic appeal of the letters was also considered important. To fit nicely on the marquee, the name could not be too long and first and last letters that were tall were supposed to be visually appealing. Finally, the theater owners decided on "Crest" because it was a new name being used for theaters on the west coast. It was also chosen for its meaning, which suggested the "peak of achievement."⁹

Commonwealth Theaters hosted a gala opening for the theater, bringing in a powerful klieg spotlight. The five-foot spotlight created a beam of light that measured fifteen million lumens and could be seen thirty miles away. The mayor of Great Bend led a procession of officials from city hall to the theater and cut a ribbon to open the doors. The Great Bend High School band provided the music. Guests included contractor Walter Flett and architects Robert Boller and Dietz Lusk, all of whom were from Kansas City, Missouri.

The opening of the Crest Theater, along with the growing popularity of home television, accelerated the demise of Great Bend's other downtown theaters. By 1958, only the Crest and the Plaza Theaters still showed movies and Commonwealth Theaters moved its division offices to the Crest Theater. In 1962, the Crest Theater was the only downtown theater that remained in the movie business. In the late 1970s, a

⁷ *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, p. 2-B, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

⁸ *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, p. 8-B, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

⁹ "New Theater's Name Selected After Long Study," *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

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new movie theater, the Village Twin Theater, opened on the west side of town, in a newer commercial district. By 1979, the city directory lists the Crest Theater as "vacant," although a *Great Bend Tribune* article states the theater vacated in 1986.¹⁰ The Crest Theater remained vacant until 1990 when the Great Bend Community Theater (GBCT) and the City of Great Bend devised a plan to reopen the building for live theater and other community events. Under the plan, the GBCT would restore the theater and oversee operations as the building's prime tenant and the City would own the theater and be financially responsible for maintaining the building. Over the next few years, the GBCT repaired the roof and air conditioning system and replaced seats to provide a comfortable environment for its audiences. The refurbishment has also retained most of the original features that made the theater so unique in 1950.

¹⁰ "Council Accepts Old Crest," *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 9 June 1990, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Microfilm.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10, Photographic Documentation Page 13

Crest Theater
Barton County, Kansas

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 2 and 3, Block 115, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas according to the recorded plat thereof.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This nomination includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource.

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Photographer: Kristen Ottesen
Date of Photographs: June 2002
Location of Negatives: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

Photograph

Number

Camera View

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Front (north) façade |
| 2. | Streetscape, view to the southwest |
| 3. | Rear elevation, view to the northwest |
| 4. | Entrance under marquee |
| 5. | East end of the primary façade ground floor and the ticket booth |
| 6. | Lobby and concession stand, view to the southeast |
| 7. | Lobby, view to the west |
| 8. | Drinking fountains, lobby |
| 9. | Front of the auditorium |
| 10. | Rear of the auditorium |
| 11. | Balcony, view to the northwest |
| 12. | Balcony, view to the west |
| 13. | Mezzanine lounge, view to the northwest |
| 14. | Mezzanine lounge, view to the southeast |
| 15. | Men's restroom, east side of the mezzanine lounge |

